

COMMUNIQUÉ ISSUED AT THE END OF A 3-DAY SYMPOSIUM - HERBFEST 2009 ON BIOBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND INCENTIVES FOR HERBAL AND NATURAL PRODUCTS 24TH – 26TH FEBRUARY 2009 AT THE SHEHU MUSA YAR'ADUA CENTRE, ABUJA

The symposium organized by Bioresources Development and Conservation Programme (BDCCP) in partnership with Nigeria Natural Medicine Development Agency (NNMDA) and International Centre for Ethnomedicine and Drug Development (InterCEDD) and supported by other stakeholders was aimed at:

- Identifying new investment opportunities in herbal & natural product
- Identifying incentives for developing natural products business
- Highlighting Regional and International Regulations and Standards for herbal & natural products
- Highlighting the use of Science & Technology for BioBusiness
- Highlighting Intellectual Property Rights Issues
- Identifying possible New/Innovative Natural Products from Africa

The opening ceremony was chaired and the symposium declared open by Dr. Alhassan Bako Zaku, the Honourable Minister of Science & Technology who was represented by Professor Peter Onwualu, Director General, Raw Materials Research and Development Council-RMRDC. Mazi Sam Ohuabunwa (President/CEO Neimeth International Pharmaceuticals) and chair of the National Economic Summit Group (NESG) presented the keynote Address titled "*Natural Products Development: Opportunity for Income Diversification in the Nigerian Economy*". It was attended by about 200 National and International participants drawn from the Academia, Governmental Agencies/Parastatals, Traditional Medicine Practitioners, Manufacturers of Herbal Products, Exhibitors, and the general public. A number of papers addressing several challenges, opportunities and policy matters on the development of biobusiness and natural products were presented. Over 35 Natural Products manufacturers exhibited their products during the symposium with an estimated 5000 visitors to the exhibitors stand.

At the conclusion of the 3-day symposium, the stakeholders present resolved and recommended as follows:

1. BioBusiness and Natural Products are the "Green Gold" potentials for Africa with annual trade estimate in excess of US \$100 Billion; it is a major non-oil source of revenue that should be fully exploited.
2. Highlighted a need to form co-operatives among stakeholders in the sector so as to ease access to funds and other incentives in the development of BioBusiness and Natural Products.
3. The need for standardization and certification of natural products so as to ensure their safety, efficacy, acceptability and marketability.
4. The need to hasten the passage of Traditional Medicine Council Bill by the National Assembly.

5. The need for Inter-Agency, Practitioners and Stakeholders to re-evaluate existing policies as well as initiate new policies that will protect and promote the practice and trade of herbal medicine and products.
6. Traditional Medicine Practitioners (TMPs) to avail themselves of all available training opportunities to improve their practice and product development skills.
7. TMPs and other Stakeholders were called upon to imbibe the culture of Good Agricultural, Collection and Cultivation Methods and Practices to ensure sustainable availability of raw materials for biobusiness development.
8. The need for Government's continued support for effective development and promotion of Traditional Medicine, its trade, and protection and conservation of the country's biodiversity.
9. The need to protect Intellectual Property Rights and Traditional Knowledge of practitioners so as to encourage information sharing and access to bioresources was highlighted.
10. The need to organize frequent symposia of this nature so as to build network of stakeholders in the herbal medicine trade.
11. The need for collaboration between scientists and Traditional Medicine Practitioners to allow for proper identification of plant materials used for drug formulation, proof of non-toxicity and efficacy of the product, and provide scientific basis for the use of the products in the management or cure of ailments.
12. The need for consistency of formulated herbal products and proper packaging from batch to batch.
13. The important role of effective collaboration between the TMPs and relevant Government Agencies (facilitated centrally by NNMDA) in developing traditional medicine products thereby exploiting the benefits of the industry nationally, was stressed and unanimously adopted.
14. There should be concerted and coordinated training effort on zonal basis for the TMPs in a similar manner that NNMDA has addressed this area of need for the past few years.

The organizers were commended for the timeliness and appropriateness of the HerbFEST and were urged to sustain it as an annual event and should be supported by all.



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